

Original article

Gender Representation in Management and Coaching Roles in Sports: A Case Study of the Banja Luka Region

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Abstract

This study investigates gender representation in management and coaching roles within sports organizations in the Banja Luka region, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research aims to provide a detailed insight into the extent of women's participation in decision-making roles and sports activities, revealing existing inequalities. A structured online questionnaire was distributed to 54 sports organizations from eight different types of sports to assess gender distribution in managerial, executive, and coaching roles. The results indicate that men overwhelmingly dominate management leadership positions, with 96.29% of managerial roles occupied by men and 62.9% of organizations having no women in management leadership. Similarly, 52.8% of the clubs do not employ any female coaches. Only 11.1% of organizations reported having policies addressing gender equality, reflecting the absence of formal mechanisms to address these disparities. The findings emphasize persistent barriers, including stereotypes and organizational culture, that hinder the inclusion of women in leadership and coaching roles. This study highlights the need for targeted interventions, including policy changes and educational efforts, to promote gender equality in sports organizations in the region.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Sports Management, Coaching, Sports Organizations, Gender Imbalance

Introduction

Gender equality is an issue that requires an understanding that gender is a social category shaped and developed in various social contexts such as culture, tradition, science, and education. The assumption is that the biological differences between women and men, or sex, result in differing gender roles, and therefore they should be valued and treated differently (Antonijević & Gavrić, 2021). For over thirty years, gender equality has gradually been taking a clearer shape through international, regional, and national legislative activities. Countries have been encouraged to adopt laws, strategic documents, and implement measures that contribute to achieving equal opportunity policies and gender equality. There has been an ongoing work to change and improve the status of women through specific norms (Walby, 2011). However, research on the slow progression of women within existing hierarchies in organizations and institutions to higher and better-paid managerial positions has concluded that gendering organizations is also necessary (Antonijević & Gavrić, 2021). Symbolic representations (Gherardi, 1995), stereotypes (Heilman, 2012), and prejudices (Eagly & Harau, 2012) regarding what jobs are ideal for women versus men, particularly in high-level managerial positions, also contribute to the maintenance of gender inequalities within organizations (Acker, 2006).

Despite a gradual increase in the number of women in sports over the past few years (Banek, 2020), women are still underrepresented in decision-making bodies in sports institutions at local, national, European, and global levels (Burton & Leberman, 2017; Evans & Pfister, 2021; Murray, 2022). The state of inequality is justified by various factors, often referring to a phenomenon recognized in science as the 'glass ceiling.' (Powell & Butterfield, 1994; Ryan & Haslam, 2005) This concept refers to the barriers (prejudices, discrimination, and stereotypes) faced by women trying to reach or who aspire to higher management positions in corporations, government, and education (Ružić & Perušić, 2014; Zang & Basha, 2023). It is no secret that men predominantly lead sports organizations worldwide (Burton, 2015; 2019), but it is also a fact that women lack opportunities for managerial positions. European society is aware that there are no quick and easy solutions to this problem, but certain efforts and initiatives are being recognized to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and to create a system in which women will have equal opportunities to be elected to management positions as men (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2024). An increasing number of sports federations in Europe, as well as globally (IOC, UEFA, EHF, UWW-Europe, ETU, ESC) have supported gender quotas through rules and demonstrated their commitment to gender equality and promoting equal access to opportunities for both genders (according to the European Institute for Gender Equality - EIGE, 2015). The trend of promoting women in sports continued with the initiative of the International Football Federation (FIFA) in 2016 called the "Women in Football Leadership Program." This program was created to help women develop their skills and knowledge to become leaders in football. As such, it provides support to women in various countries around the world and helps create a network of women working in football (Filipović et al., 2024).

There is little data and research on the status of the underrepresentation of women in the management structures of sports organizations in the region, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What is known is that there are solid legal frameworks that support equal rights for men and women, as well as institutional mechanisms for monitoring gender equality. However, the actual capacity, functioning, and impact of these mechanisms vary or are almost not applied (Popović, 2024). According to data from the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina published in the report "Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (2020) regarding the share of women in the management structures of the ten most financed Olympic sports in Bosnia and Herzegovina: taekwondo, cycling, judo, athletics, tennis, boxing, basketball, ice hockey, skating, and volleyball, there were only 5.6% women. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, no woman was the president of the management board of a sports federation in 2020. Out of 17 deputy chairs of the management board, there was only one woman. Compared to the European Union and the status of women there, the data is more than

disappointing. All this prompts us to reflect and provokes a logical question: if the situation is such at the state level, what is it like at lower levels, at the levels of entities and local communities?

This research addresses precisely this issue and raises the question of gender inequality in sport organizations in the Banja Luka region focusing on management and coaching roles. Specifically, it seeks to assess the representation and participation of women in decision-making structures and operational functions, identifying the barriers that hinder their inclusion. The study aims to provide evidence-based insights into the current state of gender balance, highlight the systemic challenges women face, and explore whether sports organizations have implemented policies to promote gender equality. Ultimately, the research intends to raise awareness about the need for greater inclusion of women in management positions in sport organizations, contributing to the development of strategies and initiatives that foster equality and break down existing stereotypes and institutional barriers.

Methods

Design and participants

This research employed a quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional design to investigate the gender representation in managerial and coaching roles within sports organizations in the Banja Luka region. A structured online questionnaire was developed to collect data on the gender structure of sports organizations, focusing on management and coaching positions. The sample consisted of 54 active sports organizations from 8 different type of sports (athletics, boxing, football, karate, basketball, volleyball, swimming, and handball). These organizations operate within the broader Banja Luka area and include individual and team sports. Their gender structure is shown in Figure 1.

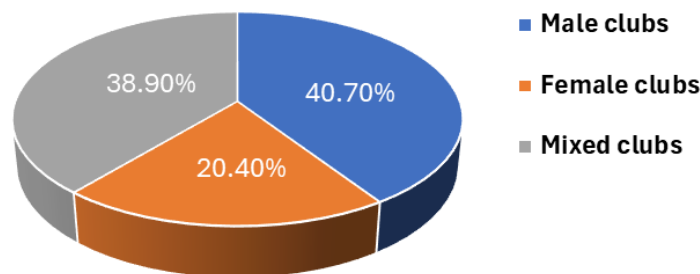


Figure 1. Percentage distribution by club type (individual and team sports).

Variables and data collection

The questionnaire focused on the following gender representation indicators: quantitative data on gender distribution in management and organizational structures (defined by presence and number of women in executive board positions and number of male and female managers/directors) and gender distribution in coaching roles (defined by number of male and female head and assistant coaches). To gain deeper insight into gender distribution, the questionnaire also investigated whether the organizations have established rulebooks or formal procedures promoting gender equality.

The data was collected through a structured online questionnaire. The questionnaire included both closed-ended questions about gender distribution and open-ended questions to explore gender equality policies within the organizations.

Statistical analyses

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the frequencies and percentages of men and women in various management roles. The results were compared across different types of sports and club structures (male, female, mixed). Variables such as the number of women and man on executive boards, in managerial roles, and in coaching positions were summarized and visualized using graphs for comparative analysis. The statistical analysis focused on identifying gender imbalances in management and coaching roles, providing insights into the potential barriers women face within sports organizations.

Results

A total of 54 responses were collected from sports organizations (Figure 2) across eight different types of sports (athletics, boxing, football, karate, basketball, volleyball, swimming, and handball) active in the broader Banja Luka area. The highest number (N=17) of responding clubs were from the football federation, followed by the basketball federation (N=12), karate federation (N=8), and volleyball federation (N=7).

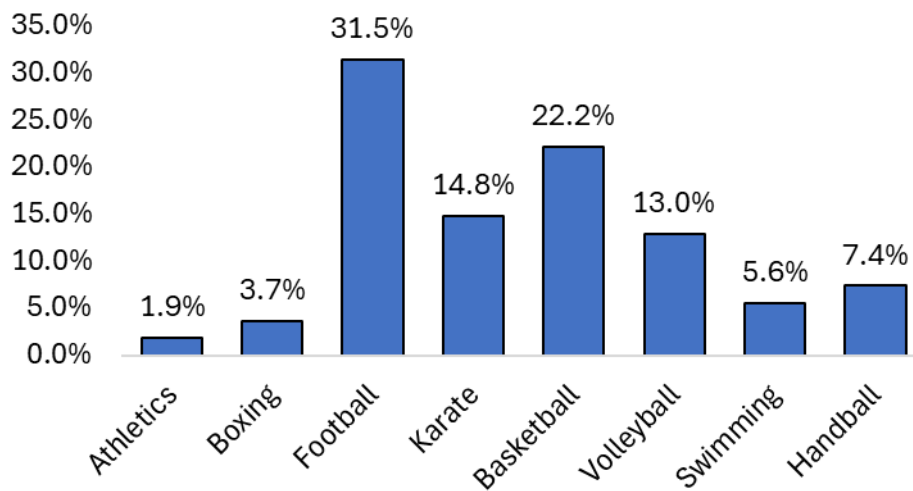


Figure 2. Number of organizations by sport disciplines.

Of the total number of clubs (18) with women in managerial positions (one or two), 10 are mixed clubs, 6 are female clubs, and only 2 are male clubs (Figure 3). The role of club secretary is held by a man in 74.1% of the surveyed sports organizations, while in 25.9% of them, the position is held by a woman.

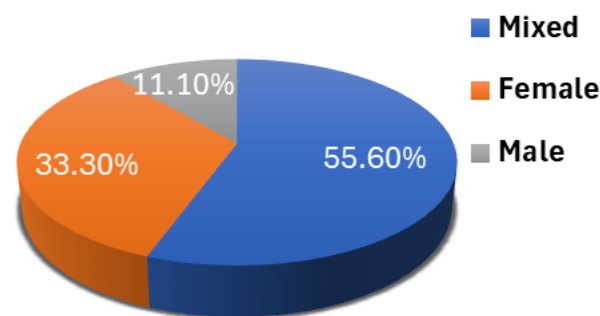


Figure 3. Percentage of clubs with women in management positions - by type of club.

In management positions (director/manager/club leader) in most surveyed clubs (96.29%) there are men, and in 62.9% of clubs, not a single woman holds one of the managerial roles. Only a quarter (25.92%) of clubs

have just one woman in a managerial position. When it comes to gender representation in the management bodies of clubs, of the total 54 surveyed sports clubs, the highest number (N=23) has no women as members of the Management Board (UO), while 17 have only one woman as a member of the UO. One organization does not have a UO but only an assembly. When comparing the data with the number of male members of the UO, there is a significantly higher representation of men compared to women. For example, 25 sports clubs have more than four male members on the UO, while only 1 organizations have more than four female members on the UO (Figure 4).

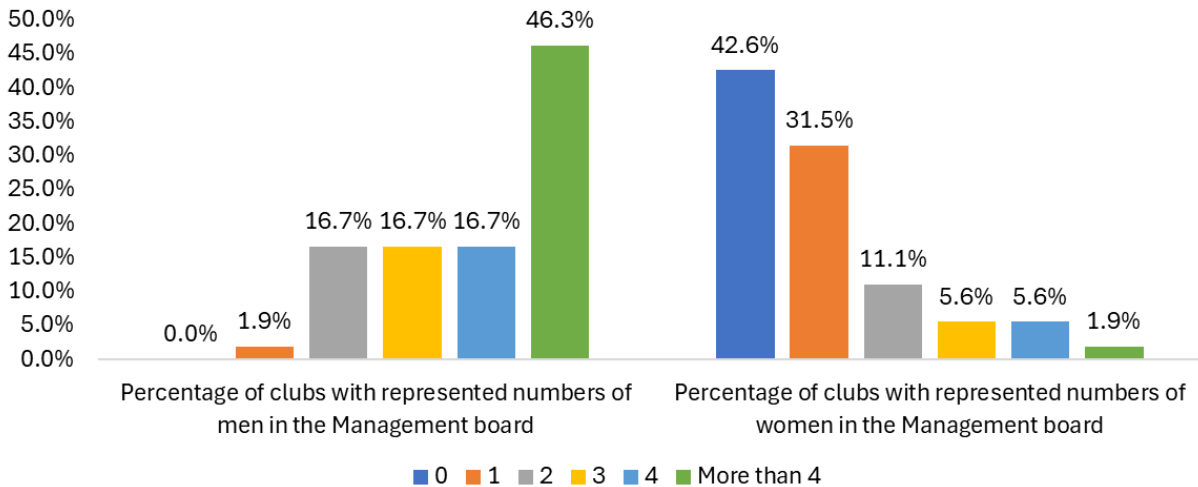


Figure 4. Percentage of clubs with represented numbers of men and women in the Management board.

Regarding the engagement of coaches in the club, one organization (association) does not have this function, so among the total of 53 sports organizations, 28 do not have any women serving as coaches in the club. Within that number, 60.7% are male clubs, 28.6% are mixed clubs, and 10.7% are female clubs. Half of that percentage consists of football clubs (both male and mixed, as well as female), while karate (mixed) and basketball (both female and male) clubs each account for 14.28%, and handball (male), volleyball (both male and female), and boxing (mixed) clubs each account for 7.1%. An overview of the number of sports organizations that have a certain number of women or men engaged in coaching roles is provided in Figure 5.

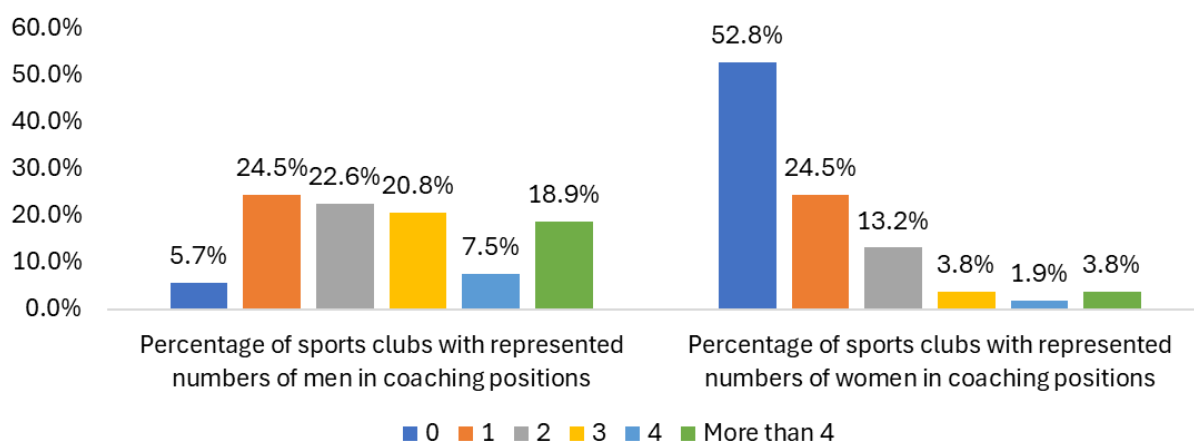


Figure 5. Percentage of sports clubs with represented numbers of men and women in coaching positions.

Out of a total of 22 sports organizations that reported the number of head and assistant coaches and have competitors in the top competition category, 12 (54.5%) have only male head and assistant coaches. Among these 12, there are 7 mixed clubs, 3 female clubs, and 2 male clubs. Additionally, within the structure of these

12 clubs, there are 3 karate clubs, 2 boxing, football, and volleyball clubs, and 1 basketball and handball club each. One sports organization, a mixed karate club, has only female head and assistant coaches. Out of 22 sports organizations, 9 (40.9%) have both male and female head and assistant coaches. Within the structure of these 9 clubs, 6 are mixed clubs and 3 are female clubs. Figure 6 shows the gender representation of head and assistant coaches in the aforementioned nine clubs, indicating that either the percentage of male and female head and assistant coaches is equal or that there is a higher percentage of females in the overall gender structure.

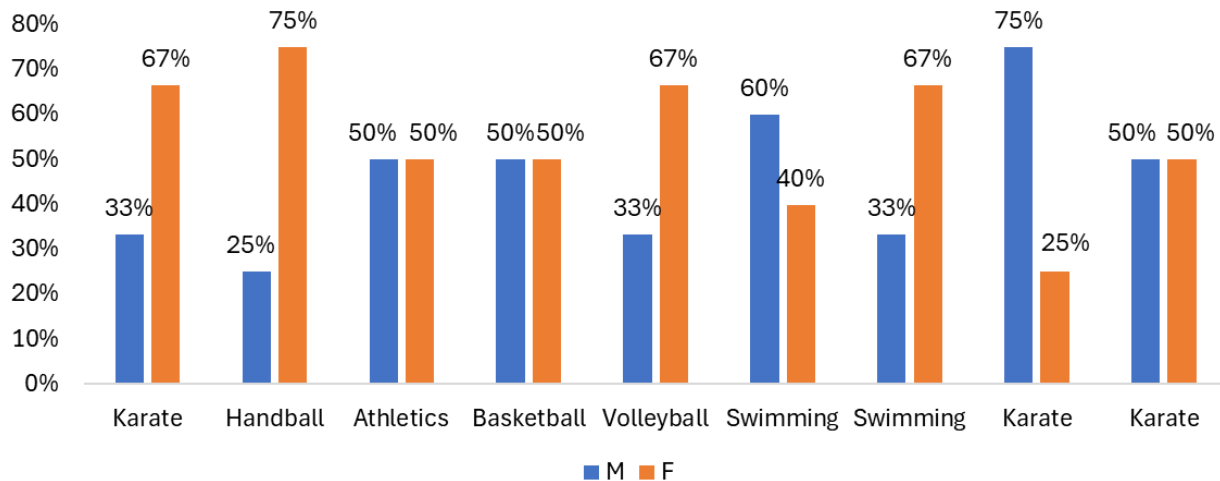


Figure 6. Percentage of sports clubs with represented numbers of men and women in coaching positions.

A survey examining specific policies and regulations related to gender equality within sports organizations revealed that 88.9% of the respondents do not have any formal acts addressing this issue, while only 11.1% do. Among those with policies, most reference their club statutes, and notably, one organizational men's football club has established a separate "Act on Racial, National, and Gender Equality."

The organizations that lack separate acts or rules related to gender equality provided several reasons for this absence. These include a lack of female representation in football, adherence to existing "Sports Law," unawareness of the necessity for such policies, the absence of a legal obligation to implement them, a predominant focus on men's football, and prevailing cultural values. Additionally, some organizations believe that their operational structures do not necessitate a separate act, asserting that gender equality is inherently supported within their existing practices.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight persistent gender inequalities in sports organizations within the Banja Luka region, particularly in management and coaching roles. Despite legislative frameworks supporting gender equality, 40.7% of surveyed organizations were male-only clubs, 20.4% female-only, and 38.9% mixed clubs. This result aligns with previous studies showing the underrepresentation of women in sports management worldwide and indicating that gender inequality in sports governance remains a global challenge (Burton, 2019; Evans & Pfister, 2021).

A significant gender imbalance was observed in executive and managerial positions, reinforcing the notion that sports management is still dominated by men. In 96.29% of the surveyed clubs, men hold top managerial roles, and no women occupy managerial positions in 62.9% of these organizations. Only 25.92% of clubs have one woman in a leadership role, emphasizing how exclusion remains entrenched. These results correspond with findings from studies across other European countries, such as Norway and Sweden, where men outnumber women in top sports management positions by 4:1, despite long-standing gender equality policies

(Stronach & Adair, 2010). In countries such as the UK, Murray (2022) found that women held only 30% of executive positions in sports governing bodies, mirroring the underrepresentation observed in Banja Luka's sports organizations. Similarly, in France and Germany, female managers comprise less than 20% of top positions in sports (Pape, 2020). Sports are seen as a traditionally male-dominated field, and progress toward gender equality is hindered by social prejudices (Fink, 2015) and established patriarchal cultural norms (Scruton & Flintoff, 2002). Several studies, such as Coakley (2009), Plaza et al. (2017), and Planinić & Ljubičić (2020), support this viewpoint. Bertoluci & Barišić (2020) highlight 'small movements' away from established norms toward more modern perspectives. Nevertheless, substantial and consistent support for such change remains absent, with efforts largely limited to symbolic gestures.

This imbalance highlights that structural barriers and stereotypes still discourage women from pursuing or maintaining management roles in sports (Acker, 2006). Stereotypes that portray management positions as a masculine domain continue to reinforce this inequality (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Additionally, the glass ceiling effect, which refers to invisible barriers preventing women from reaching top positions, has been extensively documented in the context of sports organizations (Zhang & Basha, 2023). These barriers are exacerbated by organizational cultures that tend to promote male managers, leaving women 'on the bench' even when they are qualified to lead (Burton & Leberman, 2017).

The study also reveals significant gender disparities in coaching positions. 52.8% of the surveyed clubs reported no female coaches, reinforcing the narrative that coaching is predominantly male-driven. Even in mixed and female-dominated clubs, men are overrepresented in coaching roles, mirroring trends reported by Burton (2019) and Plaza et al. (2017). The underrepresentation of female coaches was also observed in studies conducted in Australia, where only 17% of professional sports teams had female coaches, despite policies aimed at improving gender diversity (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014). A similar pattern was identified in Canada, where the percentage of female coaches has plateaued at 30% despite government initiatives aimed at increasing this number (Norman et al., 2019). These studies confirm that the Banja Luka region is not an exception but part of a broader pattern of systemic underrepresentation of women in coaching roles. This lack of diversity is problematic because female coaches serve as role models for young athletes, contributing to their development and performance. It should also be mentioned that female coaches are more prevalent in sports with a high female participation rate (e.g., dance, gymnastics, figure skating, and rhythmic gymnastic), as they primarily work with women, youth, or children competing at the local or regional level.

The absence of formal gender equality measures in many of the surveyed clubs further hinders progress. Only a small percentage of organizations reported having established rulebooks or personnel dedicated to promoting gender equality. This lack of institutional support reflects findings from studies in the US, which emphasize that symbolic policies, without enforcement, fail to address gender disparities in leadership (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

The findings suggest that introducing mandatory gender quotas and institutional gender equality plans could help address these disparities, as seen in countries like Spain and Italy, where sports organizations have made modest gains after implementing quota policies (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2024). However, it is essential to recognize that gender quotas alone are insufficient unless accompanied by educational campaigns and cultural shifts to combat stereotypes (Walton et al., 2022). Research suggests that organizational cultures must shift towards inclusive practices, focusing not only on hiring but also on retaining women in management and coaching roles (Ružić & Perušić, 2014).

The small sample size and regional scope, which focused primarily on 54 sports groups in the Banja Luka region, limited the findings' generalizability to other regions or national contexts. Furthermore, the study does not investigate other roles where gender disparities may exist, such as administrative or operational roles within sports organizations. A more comprehensive approach could delve deeper into gender inequalities by investigating not only management and coaching roles but also the impact of organizational culture,

recruitment practices, and policy implementation across various functions within sports organizations. Despite the study's limitations, it is important to highlight that this research presents pioneering initiatives in raising awareness of leadership inequalities in sport in the Republic of Srpska.

Conclusion

The general conclusion of the study is that women are underrepresented in management positions within sports clubs in the wider Banja Luka region. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to overcome cultural and structural barriers that prevent women from taking on management and coaching positions. Future initiatives should focus on policy changes, educational efforts, and the development of supportive networks for female managers and coaches. Implementing these measures is crucial for fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment in sports, ultimately benefiting both individuals and organizations. This study provides valuable insights into the structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from achieving equality in sports management and coaching roles. The findings align with global trends, confirming that gender disparities in sports are persistent and require targeted interventions. Future initiatives in the Banja Luka region should focus on implementing gender-sensitive policies, educational efforts, and the development of supportive networks for female leaders and coaches. Active mentorship programs could help accelerate progress toward greater inclusivity. Additionally, long-term monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to ensure that these policies translate into meaningful change.

The importance of achieving gender balance in sports governance cannot be overstated, as diverse management leads to better decision-making and more inclusive environments. Addressing the cultural and institutional barriers highlighted in this study will require concerted efforts from policymakers, sports organizations, and the broader community.

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